

*My introduction
Sent to Marie May 8/13/98*

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For the first time in human history, children are born into homes where mass-produced media stories reach them, on the average, more than seven hours a day. The stories do not come from their families, schools, churches, neighborhoods, and often not even from their native countries. They come from small group of global conglomerates with nothing to tell but much to sell.

That is a profound transformation in the way children are socialized. Giant industries discharge their messages into the mainstream of common consciousness. The cultural environment in which we live becomes a byproduct of marketing that invades and colonizes more and more countries around the world. There is no technological fix to that or any other social problems. New technologies only widen the gaps between the rich and the poor created by the old.

Channels proliferate and new technologies pervade home and office while mergers and bottom-line pressures shrink creative alternatives and reduce diversity of content. The marketing imperative preempts other perspectives and denies the choice essential to democratic citizenship. Four U.S. networks, allied to giant transnational corporations -- our private "Ministry of Culture" -- control the bulk of production and distribution, and shape the global cultural mainstream. Other interests, minority views, and the potential of any challenge to dominant perspectives, lose ground with every merger.

Formula-driven assembly-line produced programs increasingly dominate the public airways. Creative artists, social scientists, humanists and other change-agents can still explore, advocate, and occasionally even challenge, but, increasingly, their stories must fit marketing strategies and priorities. A fitting challenge for the international participants of the Cape Town conference is to consider how to organize and confront these impediments to communication for social change.

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